NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

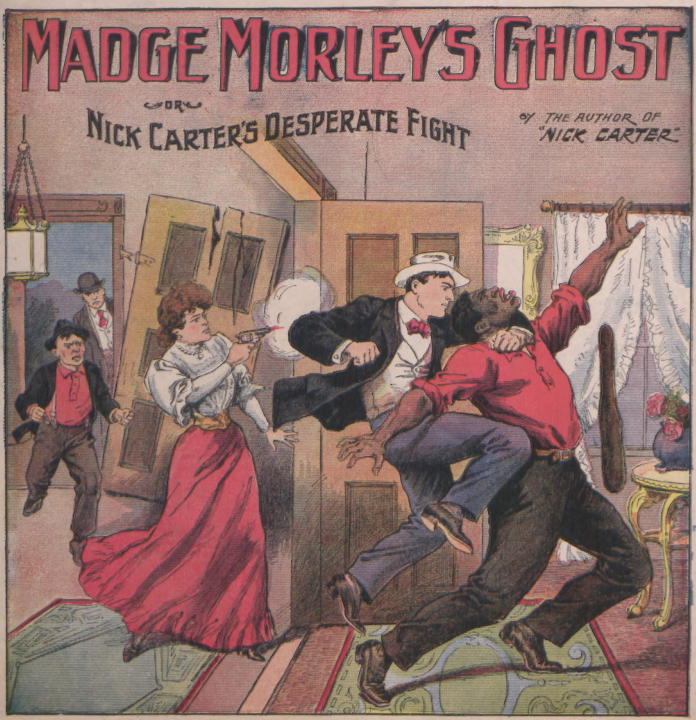
Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 519 NEW YORK, DECEMBER 8, 1906. **Price, Five Cents**

MADGE MORLEY'S GHOST

OR NICK CARTER'S DESPERATE FIGHT

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"



Nick dealt the negro a terrible blow under the ear, and with a groan he sank insensible at the detective's feet. A moment later a pistol report sounded behind Nick.

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Madge Morley's Ghost;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S DESPERATE FIGHT.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A PUZZLING CIRCUMSTANCE.

"Nick, what became of Madge Morley?"

"Eh?" said the detective, somewhat absently. "That's an odd question for you to ask, Hamilton."

The two were standing together just outside the entrance to the Fifth Avenue Hotel, where they had encountered each other, the one in the act of departing and the other just entering the hostelry.

"Do you know what became of her?" insisted Larry Hamilton. "I mean, do you know for a fact? But I don't suppose you do. Your information on the subject is doubtless exactly the same as mine."

"As a matter of fact, Larry, your information should be better than mine, on that subject," said Nick. "You have been here on the ground ever since she was taken to the hospital after that maid of hers—Susan, wasn't her name?—shot her.* If you will take the trouble to think about it, you will remember that I left the city two days later; and I have not been back here two hours."

"I suppose that we each heard the same report," said Hamilton.

"That she died? Yes; that is what I heard."

"I don't suppose you believe in ghosts, do you, Nick?"

"Hardly."

"Have you anything to do for the next hour?"

"No."

"Is that your machine there? Is that your Peerless?"

"Yes."

"Let's drive around to the hospital where she was taken and find out about Madge."

"I've no objections; but what for?"

"Let's get into the car. We'll compare notes as we go along."

"All right."

As soon as they were in the car and were riding slowly along, the subject was resumed.

"The last time I saw you, Nick, was the night that you rescued Doris Granley. It was the night when the maid

*See No. 518 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, "A Dangerous Woman."

Susan shot and wounded her mistress, Madge Morley—mortally as we supposed. Do you remember that we parted at your house and that one of the doctors at the hospital had just called you over the telephone to say that Madge was conscious, and had asked for you?"

"Yes."

"I remember your words on that occasion, Nick. You said that it was midnight and that the case had been opened just twenty-four hours before, and that you then closed it."

"Well?"

"Have you heard anything about Madge—directly, I mean—since that night?"

"No; only what I have seen in the papers."

"And that, I suppose, was merely an announcement that she had died, eh?"

"Yes; in effect that is all it was."

"I suppose it never occurred to you to verify the report?"

"No. Why should it?"

"I don't know that there is any reason why it should."

The detective turned a smiling and somewhat quizzical face upon his friend, and said:

"Larry, I have been very patient with you ever since you held me up in front of the Fifth Avenue. Don't you think it is about time that you made yourself a little bit more clear? I wouldn't mind knowing what in the world you are driving at, old chap."

"Just be patient with me and I will tell you presently. The point that I am trying to make is this: Is Madge Morley dead, or alive?"

"I think you had better tell me at once why there is any question about it at all."

"Well, in a word, it is this: If Madge Morley is dead, then her ghost walks. If she is alive, then she is the slickest article at playing ghost that you ever heard of."

"Still talking in enigmas, Larry."

"She has appeared to Doris, and she appeared to me."

"Eh? You are beginning to be interesting, Larry."

"I wish you would tell me what happened that night when you left us to go to see her at the hospital."

"Nothing happened," replied Nick.

"You saw her, of course?"

"Certainly."

"Was she conscious?"

"Yes."

"Did she think that she was dying?"

"The doctors had told her that there was no hope for her."

"Do you know if she happened to believe them?"

"She did not express her own belief on the subject to me; she did repeat what the doctors had told her."

"She could talk, then?"

"Only a very little."

"How long a time did the doctors give her to live?"

"That was problematical. I was told that she might pass away within a few hours, or that she might hold out for several days."

"As a matter of fact, when was her death reported?"

"I think it was ten days later."

"Rather a long time for one to hold out who is expected to die at any moment, isn't it?"

"Oh, I don't know. The doctors aren't half as wise as they try to make it appear."

"I'm onto that, all right. Forgive me, Nick, for asking so many questions when that should be your province, but I am anxious to get this whole affair straight in my mind before I go into the facts that I know about."

"Fire away, Larry."

"Are you willing to tell me what the conversation was that passed between you and Madge at that last interview?"

"Sure. It wasn't much, you know. She could only talk a very little—or, at least, such were the orders of the doctors."

"I understand."

"When I arrived there she was, of course, on a cot in one of the wards. Almost the first thing that she said to me was to ask me in a half-quizzical manner, although in a voice that was reduced by weakness to a whisper, if I would not spend some of that hundred thousand dollars she had helped me recover, to put her in a private room."

"Which, of course, you consented to do; eh?"

"I told her that she should have the very best of everything that the hospital afforded; and I gave orders to that effect, directing that the bill be sent to me."

"I suppose she was transferred to a private room at once."

"Yes. Before I left the hospital. They moved cot and all, you know."

"What else did she have to say?"

"Oh, she asked my forgiveness, and yours, too, by the way; wanted me to ask Doris to forgive her; asked me to go again to see her—which, as it happened, I could not do—and bade me a rather pathetic good-by."

"And was that all?"

"About all—yes."

"But there was something more?"

"There was nothing more that would interest you, Larry."

"Pardon me, Nick, but I think it would. I have got rather a startling story to tell you when I get to it——"

"Which I am afraid you never will do."

"Oh, yes, I will. What was the rest?"

"Well, Larry, if you must know, the real reason why the maid shot her was because she believed that Madge had fallen in love with me. I think that Madge herself thought she had."

A faint smile flitted across the young millionaire's face; but he asked:

"Did she mention that affair at that particular interview?"

"Yes; she referred to it. I treated it lightly, of course."

"Be serious for just a moment, Nick, and reply to a question I wish to ask."

"Well, what is it?"

"Did she not repeat her statement that—well, that she was fond of you?"

"Yes."

"And did she not say in effect that living or dead she would always be near you?"

Nick stared at his companion and nodded.

"Yes," he admitted. "She did."

"Was there any other particular request that she made to you at that visit?"

"Only one. She told me the name of a physician whom the doctors consented to call in consultation with them; and, oh, yes; there was one thing more."

"What was that?"

"She asked me to get somebody to look out for her furniture and things in the house in 111th Street. She wished the former to be sold at auction, and the funds and her clothing sent to her mother in Paris."

"Did you attend to all that?"

"I left town the next morning. I turned the whole matter over to a lawyer down-town."

"And that is all?"

"That is all, I believe."

"Well, Nick, it is now four months since that night isn't it?"

"Yes; a little more than that."

"It is four months since her death was reported; eh?"

"Yes; quite."

"During the last four weeks I have seen Madge Morley—or her ghost—twice; and during the last week Doris has seen Madge Morley—or her ghost—twice."

The detective laughed aloud.

"Larry," he said, "I would not have believed it of you. I thought you altogether too practical, but it seems that you are not. You have seen somebody whom you mistook for Madge, and so has Doris. I haven't a particle of doubt that Madge is dead, as she has been reported to be—and ghosts don't walk any more."

"All the same——"

"Here we are at the hospital, Larry."

"I'm glad of that, anyhow."

"We will find out what they have to say about it here."

CHAPTER II.

A VERY MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR.

In the office of the superintendent of the institution Nick and his friend were presently joined by the doctor with whom the detective had made his arrangements concerning the care of Madge on that other occasion to which reference has already been made.

"You remember Madge Morley, of course, doctor?" asked Nick.

"Perfectly, Mr. Carter. Certainly," was the reply.

"She died?"

"Yes."

"When?"

The doctor crossed to a desk and referred to a book.

"The twelfth day after she was admitted to the hospital," he replied, returning to his seat near the table. "To be exact, she died February 22d. Washington's birthday."

"In the private room which I secured for her?"

"Yes."

"Were you attending her at the time of her death?"

"No; I had been called away. I was in Canada."

"When were you called away, doctor?"

"I think it was the next day—or the one following that—after I saw you."

"And you did not return until after her death?"

"No; I was absent three weeks. There was illness in my own family."

"Who did attend her at the time she died?"

"A Doctor Weeks."

"Will you send for him?"

"I am very sorry, Mr. Carter, but——"

"Has he left the hospital?"

"He is dead, sir."

"Eh? Oh, well, that is unfortunate. Please look on your books and find out who were the several nurses who had the care of her. I would like to ask them some questions."

"You have forgotten, Mr. Carter, that Miss Morley was placed in a private room upon your order. You also directed that she should have the very best of everything."

"Certainly. What of that?"

"Nothing—only we gave her the very best nurse we had, and that nurse took entire charge of the patient."

"Well?"

"No other nurse would know anything about her."

"All right. One will do. Send for her. I wish to see her."

"She isn't here any more, Mr. Carter."

"No? What has become of her?"

"I missed her when I returned to the hospital, and when I asked about her I was told that she had resigned. She left the hospital three days after the death of Madge Morley."

"Humph! Well, I suppose you know her address, don't you?"

"No, sir, I do not. It is not known here at all. I would give all I—I would give a very great deal to know what her address is, Mr. Carter."

"You would? May I ask why?"

The young doctor blushed vividly. He hesitated an instant, and then he replied:

"I don't know why I should be ashamed to tell you, sir. I was, and am now, very much in love with Miss Denton. Norma is her given name."

"I understand," said the detective. "Thank you for telling me. Do you wish to find her?"

"I do, with all my heart."

"Would you like me to help you to find her?"

"I would be grateful to you all my life, Mr. Carter."

"Then you won't mind if I ask a few personal questions?"

"Not at all."

"You say that you loved Miss Denton?"

"Yes; and do now."

"Did she return your love?"

"I don't know, for certain. There were times when I thought she did."

"Have you told her of your love?"

"Not in words; but I am sure she understood."

"You have not seen her in about four months."

"No."

"Nor heard from her or about her in that time?"

"No; nothing."

"Have you an idea that she is purposely avoiding you? Or that she left here in order to rid herself of your attentions, selecting a time when you were absent to do so?"

"No, sir, no. I cannot believe the affirmative to either question."

"What method did she take in submitting her resignation?"

"Rather an unusual one. She left the hospital without saying a word, and a few days later she sent in a written resignation."

"Was it in her handwriting?"

"I don't know. I never saw her handwriting. Her——"

"Where was the resignation posted?"

"It was not posted at all. It was brought by a District messenger boy."

"Was Miss Denton a graduated nurse?"

"Yes."

"You say that she left here three days after the death of her patient?"

"Yes."

"How long after the death of Madge Morley did the death of Doctor Weeks occur?"

"He died the day before my return here. Approximately two weeks after Miss Morley's demise."

"There seems to be a strange sort of fatality connected with the admission of Miss Morley to the hospital, doctor."

"There does, indeed, sir."

"Some of the other doctors must know something about her; I refer to the patient, not to the nurse."

Doctor Wheaton smiled.

"This is a large institution, sir," he said. "The doctors regard the patients merely as patients. Unless a case is particularly interesting from a professional standpoint, this or that patient is merely an incident. I mean by that, that a patient is recognized only by the history of the case which the nurse in charge submits to the doctors when they are on their rounds. I doubt if one of them would recognize Miss Morley by her looks."

"I understand."

"In my efforts to find out something about Miss Denton, I have questioned everybody about Miss Morley, too. All that I know about it is that she died, and that the body was claimed by friends, and removed from the hospital."

"Ah! Who claimed the body? That may tell us something."

"Her mother, I was told. You will remember that she told you she had a mother in Paris. There was, I remember, something that she asked you to do in connection with her furniture and effects which were to go to her mother."

"Yes."

"The day after you were here, I cabled to her mother in Paris—Madame Christine Morlet. M-o-r-l-e-t. That was the way the name was spelled. Number 45 rue Lapine, Paris. That was the address."

"Do you recall the wording of the cable?"

"Yes. It was: 'I am dying, but will live till you come. Please come to me. Madge.'"

"And she did live until her mother arived here, eh?"

"I have been told that she died a few hours afterward; that she died in her mother's arms, and in the presence of Miss Denton."

"I suppose the body was removed at once?"

"Yes."

"Do you know where it was taken?"

"To an address in 111th Street. I can ascertain——"

"Never mind. I know what it is."

"Very good, sir."

"And that brings us back again to the nurse. Do you know of any reason at all why she should have left here so suddenly?"

"None at all."

"Have you, during your acquaintance with her, heard her make any remark which would lead you to suppose that she contemplated such an act?"

"Never."

"Do you know anything about her at all? If, for instance, she had relatives in the city?"

"I am sure that she had none. I know that she is an orphan, and I have heard her say that she was utterly alone in the world."

"She had friends, of course?"

"I do not know. I have never heard her mention any by name."

"Where was she from? Do you know that?"

"No. She was a very reticent person, Mr. Carter. I was always under the impression that some great sorrow had come into her life, and that she purposely avoided reference to it."

"Have you made inquiries at the other hospitals?"

"Yes; without result."

"And at the guild for trained nurses?"

"Yes."

"Also among the doctors?"

"I have made inquiries everywhere. I have found no trace of her."

"What has been your personal impression concerning her act?"

"I have been able to think of only one explanation for it."

"What is that?"

"I believe that the secret trouble to which I have referred must have found her out, and that either she fled from it, and is in hiding because of it, or that it has overtaken her and engulfed her against her will."

"Can you describe her to me, doctor?"

"She is very beautiful. Her hair is dark-brown—almost black. Her eyes are gray and wide apart. Her features are regular. Her forehead broad and white. Her chin round and full. Her complexion fair, but with good color in her cheeks. Her figure is perfect. She is of medium height, very graceful. She has beautiful teeth, and her voice is low and musical. Her hands are white and small—aristocratic hands they are. I have a photograph of her at my rooms; it is one that I made myself, surreptitiously. I will send it to you."

"Do so. When are you off duty, doctor?"

"I shall be free for twenty-four hours after six o'clock to-night, Mr. Carter."

"Then call upon me at my house this evening."

"At what time, sir?"

"Suit your own convenience about that."

The detective turned then to Hamilton.

"Come," he said. "There is nothing more to be learned here at present."

"What do you think about it now, Nick?" asked Hamilton, when they were again in the automobile.

"I think," replied the detective, "that there is a nigger in the wood-pile somewhere. I am inclined to take the view just now, that Madge Morley is not dead."

CHAPTER III.

THE GHOST OF MADGE MORLEY.

There was no further conversation between the two men after that until they arrived at the detective's house and had passed inside; and then Nick led the way to his study, and, after lighting a cigar and waiting until Hamilton had done the same, he said:

"Now, Larry, I'll trouble you to tell me about those apparitions, if you please."

"The ghost?" asked Hamilton, smiling.

"Yes."

"Do you want me to tell you first about my own experiences with it, or shall I tell you about Doris?"

"Tell me about your own. I will let Doris speak for herself."

"Shall I refer to the apparition—as you call it—as a ghost, or shall I call it Madge?"

"You may let it remain a ghost for the present."

"Well, my first sight of it occurred almost four weeks ago. I——"

"Where?"

"In my own room at the club."

"Eh? At the club?"

"That's what I said."

"Go on."

"You are aware of the fact that I never go to bed until everything is closed—I speak figuratively, of course."

"Oh, I know your habits."

"It was half-past two that night when I turned in. The club-house was closed for the night. I was the last one to go up-stairs. The clerk was just closing. I had been playing whist and smoking all the evening, and was as tired as a dog, so I lost no time in getting to bed, and I was asleep almost as soon as my head touched the pillow. I don't know how long I had been asleep——"

"That is quite the proper way to tell it. People never do know."

"Something awakened me. I started wide awake—I was not dreaming; I want you to believe that."

"Certainly."

"I started wide awake to discover that a figure was standing beside my bed."

"Humph! Madge?"

"Yes. Wait."

"Go on."

"There was no light in the room, and yet the figure before me was strangely illuminated. A sort of queer, blue light glowed all over it so that I could see the outlines perfectly. It had its hands raised in the manner of a clergyman when he offers the benediction, and as I opened my eyes and looked, it began to recede toward the door, or in that direction, at least."

"Well?"

"I will have to admit, Nick," Hamilton admitted rather shame-facedly, "that for a moment I was paralyzed. I don't know whether you would call it fright or not; I would say that it was more of amazement than anything else."

"Well, it went toward the door. Go on."

"While I was gaping at it, with sweat starting from every pore, and wondering whether I would yell, or if I would leap out of bed and tackle it—the thing vanished."

"How did it vanish?"

"I suppose you would say that the lights went out. Anyhow, it disappeared."

"Through the door?"

"If it was Madge in the flesh—yes. If it was Madge's ghost, I should say through the wall."

"You recognized the face as being Madge?"

"Perfectly."

"Describe it."

"How can I describe it? You know her face as well—better—than I do. Only it was snow-white; or chalk-white. You know how the clowns fix their faces, in the circus?"

"Yes."

"It looked like that."

"How could you see it all so plainly if there was no light?"

"I tell you there *was* a light; about the figure itself; not in the room."

"Shone through the garments, eh? And upon the face?"

"Yes."

"What were the garments? Winding sheets? Shrouds? People are never buried in shrouds any more."

"It was just a loose gown of some sort. I can't tell what. I should say that it was gray or a bluish-gray. The light seemed to shine through it, as if it came from the inside."

"Which I have no doubt it did do. Did you hear the door open or close?"

"I didn't hear a sound of any description."

"What did you do when it disappeared?"

"I jumped out of bed."

"Right away?"

"No; to tell you the honest truth, I didn't. I think I must have been half a minute or more in recovering my wits."

"In fact, you were badly scared."

"I suppose so. I was almost as white as the ghost when I looked at myself in the glass a little later."

"Did you notice what time it was?"

"No; I didn't think of it."

"What did you do?"

"I pulled myself together, turned on the lights—every one there is in the room—slipped into a bath-robe and slippers, and started for the door."

"Wait. Do you keep your door locked?"

"I don't think I have ever locked it in my life. The club isn't like a hotel, you know."

"Yes. Go on. You jumped for the door; then what?"

"It was closed; I remember that much."

"Well?"

"I opened it and looked outside."

"And discovered nothing, of course. Then what?"

"I screwed up my courage and finally went down-stairs. Of course, there wasn't anybody about, so I finally went back to my room. I was glad to get there, too, if anybody should ask you."

"I have no doubt of it."

"Well, Nick, I may as well confess. I went back to bed, but I left the lights on all the same, and they were still lighted when I awoke about eight in the morning."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Did you say anything about the affair to anybody?"

"Not likely. They would have thought I had 'em sure. And, besides, after I had thought the thing over very carefully, I came to the conclusion that it was a night-mare or a dream. I made up my mind and convinced myself that I had seen nothing at all."

"Is the club-house door kept on a latch at night, or do belated members have to ring for admittance?"

"There are latch keys; but they are only given to members who room at the club."

"You say that you have seen the ghost twice. When was the other time?"

"Last week."

"When and where was that?"

"At my bungalow, in Connecticut. You know. Thirty miles from here."

"Yes."

"It was Wednesday night. I had taken a party out with me to spend a few days. We went Wednesday, so it was the first night there—and also the last, for there were others in the house who saw the ghost that time."

"Others?"

"Yes. Doris saw it, and her aunt saw it; and little Phil Paxton saw it, too."

"So, that was one of the times when Doris saw it, eh?"

"Yes."

"Go on with your own experience with it that time."

"It was almost precisely the same."

"You were awakened without knowing what woke you; you found a figure standing beside you, and that figure was illuminated, and all that? Is that what you mean?"

"That's it."

"Dressed the same? Face the same strange white? And all that?"

"Precisely."

"And you were paralyzed just the same, I suppose."

"I guess I was, Nick."

"Your door wasn't locked that time, either, was it?"

"No."

"And did it disappear in just the same manner that it did the first time?"

"Yes."

"What did you do then?"

"Well, I did a little better than before. I jumped out of bed instantly and took after it, but, just as I did so, I heard a commotion at the far end of the hall."

"What was that?"

"It was Doris and her aunt having a screaming-match. I think it was a tie at that."

"Humph! Did you go to them?"

"I did, as soon as I got something on me. I wasn't exactly presentable at just that moment."

"I suppose not. Well?"

"I found that the ghost had been in Doris' room, and also in her aunt's room; and while they were trying to tell me about it, out stepped Paxton from his room, frightened almost to death. He was in his pajamas, and I had to grab him and hustle him back again."

"I see. It was quite a party that you had, there in the corridor of your bungalow."

"I should say so."

"And I suppose it lasted some time, while you were exchanging confidences about the ghost, did it not?"

"I suppose so."

"So the ghost had plenty of time to get away; eh?"

"Yes; if you put it that way."

"How do you account for the ghost's going into Paxton's room?"

"I don't—unless it was because that is the room that I used to occupy."

"Oh, I see. Madge was looking for you."

"Probably."

"So she went first into the room where Doris was, passed from that one into Mrs. Aldershot's, then she made a break for you and found Paxton, and then—she found you."

"I guess that's about it, Nick."

"And the whole bunch was so frightened that, although she actually visited four rooms in succession, there wasn't one in the outfit who had sense enough to chase her. I'm going to make you a present of a tin whistle and a jumping-jack, when Christmas comes, Larry."

"Thank you. I think myself that they would be quite appropriate."

"I wonder what game Madge is trying now?" Nick asked, addressing the question more to himself than to his companion.

CHAPTER IV.

WHO WAS IN THE CASKET?

The detective turned to the telephone and called up the lawyer to whom he had referred in his first talk with Hamilton as the one to whom he had delegated the charge of Madge Morley's property.

"Hello, Carleton," he said. "This is Carter. Just got back to-day. I wanted to ask you to tell me what you did in regard to that matter of Miss Morley's. The house in 111th Street, you know."

"Yes. I did nothing at all," was the reply.

"No? How was that, Carleton?"

"I received word a few hours after you talked with me. It came from Miss Morley, and said that her mother had been sent for. It instructed me to leave matters as they were until her arrival, after which she would attend to it."

"Did you ever see the mother?"

"Yes. She came to the office to see me."

"Do you know where she is now?"

"Gone back to Paris, where she lives."

"Do you know what became of the furniture, and so forth, in the house in 111th Street?"

"It was sold in bulk to a second-hand dealer."

"When?"

"About a week after Miss Morley's death."

"Did you atend the funeral?"

"No."

"Do you know where it was held?"

"At the 111th Street house."

"Where was the interment?"

"It was a cremation; at Fresh Pond, I think."

"Did you ever hear of a Miss Norma Denton, Carleton?"

"No; never heard the—— Hold on! Yes, I did. It was she who brought the message from Miss Morley about her mother."

"Tell me what you know about her."

"That is all I know about her. She said she was the nurse, if I remember correctly."

"Yes. Never heard of her or saw her since, eh?"

"No."

"I guess that is all. Good-by."

The detective wheeled his chair and faced Hamilton again.

"Larry," he said, "after what you have told me about the ghost, I am beginning to think that I can see a hole in this mill-stone."

"I wish that you would show it to me," replied Hamilton, eagerly.

"In the first place, we are forced into the opinion that Madge did not die."

"Yes."

"Second, that the doctor—Weeks was his name—and the nurse were bribed into assisting her with the deception she sought to put into practise."

"It does look that way."

"And the doctor is dead, while the nurse has disappeared."

"Exactly."

"I don't know that Madge ever committed a murder, although I don't think she would hesitate at one to carry her point—provided it were absolutely necessary."

"What are you getting at now, Nick?"

"I am wondering if she had anything to do with the death of that doctor. I am sorry that I did not ask Wheaton what killed him."

"I asked him," said Hamilton. "I did it just as we were leaving; while you were cranking up the machine."

"Good! What did he say?"

"Apoplexy."

"Humph! Do you know, Larry, that there are several kinds of poison which will produce the symptoms of apoplexy?"

"I have heard so."

"I haven't any doubt that Madge had a hand in the disappearance of the nurse."

"Nor I. But do you think that—that——"

"That Madge murdered her? Is that what you wished to ask?"

"Yes."

"I don't know what to think about it at present. It is very plain to me that Madge could not have simulated death so but what it would have been discovered, unless the doctor assisted her. With his aid it would have been an easy matter for the whole plan to be carried out. With his aid and the nurse's combined, the affair was easy."

"Of course," said Hamilton. "I see it now. There was the death certificate; the laying out of the body; its removal to the house in 111th Street; a fake funeral with the body of a dead dog in the casket for the cremation, so that ashes would be found afterward. It was all dead easy with the doctor and the nurse for confederates."

"Sure. Only you forget one thing," said Nick. "There must have been a human body for the cremation ceremonies. All bodies to be consumed are removed from the casket and swathed in sheets, prepared for that purpose. But, however that was afterward, Madge had only to lie by somewhere until she entirely recovered from her wounds. Did I ever tell you what she confessed to me once? That time when she had me tied up in her house like an Egyptian mummy?"

"No."

"She admitted that she believed herself to be the most expert burglar alive."

"What has that to do with the present circumstance?"

"Merely that it explains the readiness with which she might have gained access to your club and to your bungalow."

"But how did she play the ghost so perfectly?"

"Very easily. Talcum powder would make her face white and could be quickly rubbed away with a dry handkerchief and a damp one. She could disguise herself as a man and carry in one of the coat pockets a very thin, gauzelike gown that would reach from throat to her feet."

"Well?"

"A couple of dry batteries in her pockets and two or three electric-light bulbs of blue glass would produce the effect you noticed."

"What the devil did she want to appear to me at all for?"

"I haven't solved that problem yet. I don't suppose you missed anything, did you?"

"No."

"She had some purpose in wishing to frighten you."

"But why?"

"I don't know. When and where was the other time that Doris saw her?"

"In her own room at home; night before last."

"Were the conditions—was what she saw just the same as you have already described?"

"No."

"You may tell me about it if you will."

"Doris said that she was awakened by the feeling that a hand was pressing heavily upon her forehead and that she also felt another across her body."

"That sounds suspiciously like nightmare."

"Wait. She tried to scream, but she couldn't utter a sound; and then, in the same glow of light that I have already described, Madge appeared to her."

"Go on. Give me the whole story."

"She was standing in the middle of the floor. One arm was outstretched and the hand was pointing at Doris. Then she disappeared and in a moment appeared again at the foot of the bed."

"That was accomplished by turning off the light and turning it on again when she had altered her position."

"I suppose so. But Madge spoke to her."

"Eh? What did she say?"

"Doris says that she spoke in a deep whisper. She said something about her body being restless——"

"She evidently forgot that it was supposed to be cremated. But go on."

"She said she could not rest until she knew that those she had wronged had forgiven her, and a lot more rot of that sort. Doris tried to rise, but something held her, and then the ordeal proved too much for her nerves."

"She fainted?"

"Yes. When she came around again—well, there wasn't anything in the room and she insists that her door was locked on the inside, just as she had left it when she retired."

"With the key in the door, I suppose."

"Yes; with the key in the door."

"Burglar's forceps would have turned that key very easily from the outside, Larry."

"I suppose so."

"Did Doris get up at once and light the light?"

"No; not for some time. Then she went to her aunt and roused her. Her uncle got up also, and they went the rounds of the mansion. There wasn't a thing disturbed anywhere."

"I see so?"

"Great Scott! isn't it enough?"

"I suppose Doris is thoroughly convinced that she saw a ghost, isn't she?"

"She is as soon as it begins to get dark. She doesn't believe in ghosts in the day."

"Now, Larry, are you expecting another visitation from the ghost?"

"I can't say, I'm sure. You tell."

"What are you going to do if it should appear again?"

"I'm going to grab it."

"Good! How about Doris?"

"I can't answer for her."

Nick pondered for a few moments.

"It seems to me," he said presently, "that my game is to try to find Miss Denton. I have an idea that if Miss Denton is alive, her trail will lead us to Madge; and I think that she will be a whole lot easier to find."

"Wheaton doesn't seem to have had any luck looking for her."

"No; but Wheaton isn't Nick Carter. That isn't brag, Larry; it refers only to the difference in our professions."

"It is my humble opinion," said Hamilton, "that if your theories about the matter are correct, Madge has put Miss Denton out of the way entirely."

The detective started to his feet with a sharp exclamation.

"By Jove!" he said.

"What is the matter now?" asked Hamilton.

"That coffin! The cremation! Don't you see?"

"See what?"

"Don't you see how she could get rid of the nurse?"

"You don't mean—— Great Heaven, Nick!"

"There was the coffin all ready. There had to be a funeral; there should have been something to cremate, so that ashes would be left. What would have been more simple than to put Miss Denton out of the way, and let her body take the place of Madge's in the casket?"

"It is too horrible even to think about," said Hamilton.

"Maybe so; but to me it sounds awfully like Madge," said Nick.

CHAPTER V.

THE MYSTERY ABOUT MISS DENTON.

Doctor Wheaton called upon the detective that evening at eight o'clock and brought with him the photograph he had taken of Norma Denton. Nick studied it long and earnestly, and then asked if he might retain it for the present.

"I ought to tell you at once, Mr. Carter," he said, "that since I saw you to-day, I have received a message from Miss Denton."

"You *have!*" exclaimed Nick.

"Yes. It came about an hour after you left the hospital."

"Did you bring it with you?"

"Yes. Here it is."

He extended a note to the detective, who took it and read aloud:

"'Dear Doctor Wheaton: I write to you now because you were such a good friend to me at the hospital. You have, perhaps, been both amazed and puzzled by my sudden action in leaving there as I did, and it has just occurred to me that—because you were such a friend to me—you may have been anxious concerning me.

"'I write this to assure you that I am well; and if not happy, as nearly so as it is possible for me to be. I cannot explain fully to you now, and you will not ask me to do so. I can only say that for reasons best known to myself, and thoroughly reasonable from my point of view, I thought it necessary to disappear—for a time, at least.

"'Be patient, therefore, my friend. I know that you have been making some efforts to find me, and these I hope you will discontinue. All in good time I will reappear; and in order that you may be assured of my welfare, I will write to you from time to time.

"'Sincerely yours,

"Norma Denton."

"'P. S.—If you should happen to encounter me on the street, I beg that you will pass me for the time without recognition; and if by any chance you should hear where I am living, I ask you to make no effort to see me until I have sent you word that you may do so.'

"I suppose you have no doubt that this letter was written by Miss Denton?" asked Nick.

"None whatever. Certainly not," was the reply.

"Did you, by any chance, think to bring with you that letter of resignation that she sent to the hospital?"

"No. I did not understand that you wished to see it."

"You have seen it, have you not?"

"Yes."

"Is the handwriting the same as this?"

"Yes."

"You are positive?"

"Certainly. May I ask why you make these inquiries?"

"Merely to be sure of the ground we are on; that is all."

"But what could make it surer than that letter?"

"Possibly nothing at all. But it is now four months since she disappeared. She left very mysteriously. This afternoon you saw me and asked me to help you to find her—or, rather, I offered to help and you eagerly accepted the offer."

"So I did; and I am none the less grateful."

"I understand that. The point is that within a few hours, or a few minutes after I made my call upon you at the hospital, you receive a note from Miss Denton."

The doctor smiled.

"Isn't that what you would call a coincidence?" he asked.

"It may be so. By the way, Mr. Hamilton informs me that you told him that Doctor Weeks died of apoplexy."

"Yes; that is true."

"Was there a post mortem?"

"No; it was not regarded as necessary."

"Did he die in his bed, at night?"

"Yes."

"Who gave the death certificate?"

"Doctor Skinner. They were very warm friends when he lived."

"Where is he buried?"

"He was cremated."

"Indeed! Two cremations, eh? Did you know that Miss Morley was also cremated?"

"I supposed that she had been."

"Why did you suppose so?"

"She told me before I went away that when she died she wished to be cremated."

"Ah! Did you pass that information along to Weeks when you turned the case over to him?"

"I think I mentioned it to him—yes."

"You already knew, of course, that he approved of cremation?"

"Certainly."

"Did you ever happen to mention that fact to Miss Morley?"

"Why, yes, I think I did."

"Tell me just how it was that you happened to do that."

"It was when I broke her goodbye, having found that I had to go away. I explained to her that I was leaving her in the care of Doctor Weeks; and she whispered in a pathetic sort of way, that if I were not there she feared that her body would be sent to the dissecting-table after she died. I assured her that it would not, and again she said something about cremation, whereupon I assured her that the subject was one of Weeks' hobbies. She seemed greatly relieved."

"I have no doubt of it," said Nick dryly. "Tell me, carter, did you think the day when you saw her the last time, that she would die?"

"I felt very little hope for her. However, I thought she was decidedly better then."

"Miss Denton had already taken charge of her, had she not?"

"Yes."

"What was her opinion on the subject?"

"If she had one, she did not express it."

"Nurses often become very fond of their patients, do they not? Especially where they have sole charge as in that case?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice any particular fondness as expressed between patient and nurse in this case?"

"Yes. I even remarked laughingly that they seemed like old friends who had met after a long separation."

The detective was silent a moment; then he said:

"I suppose, now that you have received that message from Miss Denton, that you prefer that I should make no effort to find her; eh?"

"Why, I feel in duty bound to respect her wishes; certainly."

"Can you imagine any impulse which would induce Miss Denton to write you such a letter as that one?"

"Our friendliness for each other. Nothing more."

"But you told me that you had never mentioned the subjects of love and marriage to her."

"I never did."

"And yet that letter is one which a young lady might have written to a sweetheart."

"Do you think so? Anyhow, she could not have helped knowing that I loved her."

"Four months is a long time to have kept you in suspense, Wheaton."

"I suppose it was something of a struggle for her to bring herself to the point of writing the letter at all."

"Possibly."

"Are you holding something back from me, Mr. Carter? Have you another opinion about the matter?"

"Yes; I have a very decided one."

"Will you tell me what it is?"

Nick was silent.

"Will you tell me what it is?" Wheaton asked again.

"If you will promise secrecy, and if you think you are strong enough to stand a shock."

"A shock! What do you mean?"

"Yes, a shock—and one I must admit which may not be true."

"Please tell me what you mean."

"Will you keep what I tell you to yourself? At least, until we know it to be true?"

"Yes; I promise."

"The first thing that I shall tell you I practically know to be true, Wheaton."

"What is that, Mr. Carter?"

"Madge Morley did not die. She is not dead. She is very much alive, in fact."

"Impossible!"

"On the contrary, it is true. I am satisfied of that much."

"What does it mean? What do *you* mean?"

"This: Doctor Weeks and the nurse—Miss Denton—must have conspired together, and with Madge Morley, to cheat the hospital authorities——"

"I will never believe that—*never!*"

"There is no use in my continuing, in that case. But how else could Madge have carried out her scheme? It could not have been done without the connivance of both the nurse and the doctor, could it?"

"No; but I do not believe that it was done."

"I tell you that it was done. Madge Morley is alive to-day."

"Have you seen her?"

"No; but I know two people who know her well who have seen her; and I have no doubt that I shall see her soon."

"I cannot believe it. There must be some mistake. I don't believe that Norma would ever consent to lend herself to such a scheme."

"She might. Remember that you know nothing of her past."

"I know that it was as pure and upright as truth itself."

"You believe it, and I am willing to believe it; but neither of us know that to be true."

"What could induce such a woman as Norma to consent to such a thing? Tell me that."

"If it were any other woman than one you love, I should say that bribery might have been the moving power. I will not say that in this case, because that would hurt your feelings. But where bribery cannot be used, threats sometimes can."

"I don't know what you mean."

"I am referring to two things that you have mentioned yourself."

"For God's sake, tell me what they are!"

"To that unknown past wherein you believed that some cloud hung over the head of the woman you loved; and to the remark that you made to one or both of them that they appeared to be like two old friends who had been a long time separated!"

Wheaton sat with his head bowed and did not reply.

"If the latter were true," continued Nick, "and if there was a past, it was probably known to Madge Morley; and if that is so, you may rest assured that Miss Morley was one to make the utmost of her knowledge. But all that is not what I started to tell you."

"What was it?"

"This: I am going to the Fresh Pond Crematory in the morning. I wish to know positively if a body was consumed at the time it was supposed that Madge Morley's body was burned. I know that Madge Morley is alive—and practically well: and so, if a body was consumed, there must have been a substitution of corpses."

CHAPTER VI.

A PUZZLING COMPLICATION.

At first the full significance of what the detective had said did not impress the doctor, but nevertheless he sat staring at Nick, convinced that there was something more than appeared on the surface.

And then, suddenly, the full meaning dawned upon him.

He leaped to his feet with a cry as if he had been dealt a blow; and then he sank back again upon his chair and buried his face in his hands.

After an interval he looked up again. His face was drawn and haggard, but he spoke with calmness.

"Do you mean to say, Mr. Carter," he asked, "that it is a possible deduction that Madge Morley has first induced Doctor Weeks and—and Norman Denton—to assist her in her plot to escape from the hospital, and that afterward she has murdered both of them?"

Nick nodded, but he made no other reply.

"And that afterward," continued the young physician, "she substituted the body of one of her victims—of Norma Denton, in fact—for her own, for the cremation ceremonies?"

Again the detective nodded.

The doctor rose again and crossed the room. Then he returned to his chair.

"I must force myself to be calm," he said, as if he were arguing with himself. "I must not permit myself

to act like a child; and I know that you, Mr. Carter, have a much better head for intricate affairs than I possess. Please be patient with me."

"With all my heart, Wheaton."

"I will control myself now, and try to be logical."

"That is right."

"May I ask a few questions?"

"All that you wish."

"If it is possible that there is truth in your surmises, how would you account for this letter that I have received? The letter that I supposed came from Miss Denton."

"I should say that it was written by Madge Morley."

"And the letter of resignation?"

"That also."

"How would she dare——"

"She had possibly informed herself of the fact that you were not familiar with the handwriting of Miss Denton; or, it is even likely that she adds the talent of copying other people's handwriting to her many other accomplishments. You do not know, but it may be true that this letter is a very good representation of Norma Denton's handwriting."

"That is quite true. I had not thought of that."

"There is another circumstance which would support me there that Madge Morley wrote and sent this letter, Wheaton."

"What is it?"

"The fact that it was delivered to you so soon after my interview with you at the hospital."

"I do not understand you."

"I don't think that Madge Morley fears anybody but me in this affair; but she has a wholesome fear of me. I am not throwing bouquets at myself, but the plain facts of the case are that she is a criminal and I am a detective, and that she has already had good cause to know that I am not easily deceived by her class."

"Well?"

"In carrying out her plans she has doubtless kept herself well informed of the time of my return to the city. I have no doubt that she knows the exact hour of my arrival home, and is fairly well posted regarding my movements since I arrived."

"I understand you now."

"Then being the case, she would know, first, that I held a lengthy interview with Lawrence Hamilton; second, that Hamilton and I went together to the hospital; third, that I would discover enough there to make me suspicious. Therefore, she prepared and sent the letter to you to convince you—and me through you—that no harm has befallen Miss Denton."

Wheaton nodded his head.

"Like all such people, she overleaped herself just a little that time. In fact, she has jumped a little bit too far in every move that she has made."

"Mr. Carter, is it your honest conviction that—that Norma Denton—is dead?"

"I won't say that. I will say that I fear it."

"But if that is true, and Madge Morley did write this letter, what does she mean by insinuating that I may encounter Miss Denton on the street at any time?"

"It is done to give you hope; to further reassure you; to blind my eyes through you; or it is done because——"

"You were about to add something to what you were saying, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes; but I will not say—at least, not just at present—what was in my mind. What time do you go on duty at the hospital to-morrow, doctor?"

"At nine in the morning."

"Could you get a day or two off, do you think?"

"Yes."

"Where is your home? Where do you live?"

"In 110th Street."

"Write your name and address on that card"—and the detective passed one to him—"and in the morning I wish you would go to the hospital at the usual time, but instead of reporting for duty, ask to be excused for two days. Then return to your home and wait for me there."

"But why?"

"Never mind why, just at present. Do it because I ask it of you. Will you?"

"Yes."

"I will call to see you at your home sometime during the morning."

"Do you mean that I am to assist you in your work on this case?"

"Yes; I mean that I think I know a way in which you can make yourself useful to me, if you will do it."

"That, of course, involves the idea that we are to continue the search for Miss Denton, notwithstanding the contents of this letter that is supposed to come from her?"

"Certainly."

"And you really think that we should do so?"

...n and certain of it; and I will add that I shall continue that search no matter what position you may take."

"Very well; I will help you. I will wait for you at my house."

"Do you live with your own people, doctor?"

"No; I board with a family where I have lived since I came to the city to begin the study of medicine."

"Very good. I will look for you there—at this address."

"There is nothing more to-night, is there, Mr. Carter?"

"Nothing. You had best go to your home now and get what rest you can. Don't forget that you have heard only the worst side of possibilities. I am not always right in my deductions. It is possible that Miss Denton is alive and well at this moment. Good night."

As soon as the detective finished his breakfast the following morning, he crossed to Long Island and took his way to the crematory at Fresh Pond.

With data and date at his command he had no difficulty in convincing himself that a body had been consumed at the time when Madge Morley's body was supposed to have been incinerated; but in his efforts to obtain a description of that body he utterly failed.

All that he could ascertain was that the corpse had been a woman, and that there had been three persons present at the crematory, supposed to have been friends of the person who was dead.

These three, they told him, were two women and a man. One of the women was middle aged, had gray hair, but looked young for her probable years. The other was much younger, dark, and very beautiful. Both had kept their veils drawn most of the time. The man, they said, looked like an Englishman or a Scotchman.

"It seems," said the detective, in referring to the subject later, to Hamilton, "that they have rush hours at crematories as well as at banks, ferry-boats, and bridges. It happened to be a rush hour at the incinerating time when the body of Madge Morley was supposed to be taken there, and she had to take her turn."

"It's a devilish gruesome subject, anyhow," said Hamilton.

"Yes," said Nick. "They 'think' that the corpse had dark hair, but they are not 'sure.' That is as far as the investigation goes."

When the detective returned from the crematory he went first to his own home, and there he found a note awaiting him from Doctor Wheaton.

It had been written from the hospital that morning, and the contents were somewhat startling.

"Dear Mr. Carter," it said, "I am entirely upset by an incident that occurred this morning, and I hasten to tell you about it; but, first, let me say that I have secured a leave of absence from the hospital for four days, and I hope that you will lose no time after you receive this in calling upon me at my home.

"The incident to which I have referred is this: When I started out this morning I took my regular course down-town, which is to walk to Lenox Avenue and take the subway. As I was about to pass in at the entrance to the subway, a woman who was thickly veiled was approaching me from beyond the entrance. As I looked at her she raised her veil for the briefest instant. It was enough, however, for in that instant I recognized the face of Norma Denton.

"I was about to leap forward, forgetful of her injunctions, when she placed a finger to her lips as a warning for me to keep silent; and while I stood spellbound, not knowing what to do, she dropped the veil again and hurried on. But as she did so, I saw a piece of paper flutter from her hand to the ground. I secured it and you will find it enclosed herewith. It speaks for itself.

"Of one thing I beg you to understand. I am convinced that it was Miss Denton whom I saw. There could be no mistake. I will await your coming at my home."

The enclosure was as follows:

"Dear Doctor Wheaton: Tear this up when you have read it. I am going to wait near the subway station this morning in order to catch a glimpse of you and to let you see my face for a moment so that you may be assured that I am all right. I hope you will not try to speak to me. You will hear from me again soon.

"Norma Denton."

The detective read both notes twice; then he put them in his pocket.

"It is a deep game," he muttered; "but that woman whom Wheaton met this morning was not Norma Denton. I am convinced of that. It was Madge—but what in the world is she trying to do? That is what puzzles me.

"Madge is an artist in any line she chooses to adopt, and I suppose it would be no more difficult for her to make up to represent Norma Denton than it would be for me to copy the appearance and manners of other men—as I have done successfully many a time.

"I wonder if she thinks that she can fool me as well as Wheaton."

He produced the picture of Miss Denton that Wheaton had left with him and studied it for a few moments.

"Barring the difference in complexion and hair, such a transformation would not be a difficult undertaking," was his comment, as he returned it to his pocket. "I will go to Wheaton now and see what he has to say on the subject."

But when he asked for the doctor at the house where he lived, he was told that Doctor Wheaton had returned from the hospital at half-past eleven, but that shortly thereafter a messenger boy had brought him a letter, and that he had gone out at once upon reading it.

He had not returned, and he had left no word for the detective.

CHAPTER VII.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF DOCTOR WHEATON.

The detective looked at his watch and discovered that the doctor had been gone from the house rather more than an hour. Then he said:

"Madam, it is possible that you have noticed that the doctor is greatly worried about a private affair which he may or may not have explained to you. We had a long interview together last evening, and I was to come here after him this morning. He also sent me a note from the hospital this morning in which he asked me to make haste to meet him here. I came as soon as it was possible to do so."

"Well, sir?" she asked.

"I am Nick Carter—the detective. I am Doctor Wheaton's friend. I am very much afraid that he is in great personal danger and also that he has now gone rather more than half-way to meet it."

"Oh, sir, I hope that nothing will happen to him. How could it?"

"I cannot explain that just now. What I wish you to do is to take me to his room. I wish to look around it a little, and would be glad if you would remain with me while I do so."

"Come this way," she said to him at once.

The room was what is known in New York city houses as "the alcove room," and there was no doubt that it was occupied by a doctor, and a studious one at that.

When they entered it, Mrs. Cary remained near the door while the detective looked about the place; and as he had more than half-expected might be possible, he discovered at once that in Wheaton's haste to leave, he had left the letter he had received lying upon the table.

"Here is the note he received, which called him out," said Nick. "I shall read it."

"Will you read it aloud, sir?" asked the woman, her face greatly troubled.

Nick glanced at her in some surprise, and he saw that the woman was very much in earnest, and that the request sprang only from her personal interest in the welfare of the doctor.

"Certainly," he replied, and read aloud:

"'DEAR DOCTOR WHEATON: Will you come at once to the corner of Fourth Avenue and 112th Street? I must see you without delay if you would help me in a trouble that threatens—and I know that I can rely upon you. Please make haste. NORMA.'"

"Who is 'Norma'?" asked the landlady.

"A Miss Denton—formerly a nurse at the hospital," replied Nick. "Did you answer the bell when this note was brought here?"

"No; he went to the door himself. We were sitting in the parlor talking together at the time."

"Tell me exactly what happened, please."

"I heard him say, 'I will go at once.' He looked in at the parlor door as he was passing and told me that he was called out for a little while. Then he ran up the stairs two steps at a time and a moment later dashed out of the house."

"Did you see the messenger who brought the note?"

"Yes."

"Who was it?"

"A boy—not a regular messenger boy."

"Just a lad who had been found playing in the street somewhere and who consented to deliver the message, I suppose."

"That is the way it impressed me, sir."

"It was before twelve when the doctor went out?"

"It was half-past eleven when he came in. He went to his room and was gone only a moment when he came down to the parlor where I was sitting. I don't think we had been talking five minutes—certainly not more than ten—when the message came."

"May I ask what you were discussing?"

"He had just told me that he had secured a leave of absence from the hospital for four days. I told him that I thought he needed the rest, and he was about to say

knowledge about the reasons for his absence from his office when the messenger arrived."

Nick nodded.

"I hope, sir," said the woman, "that he is in no real danger. What could threaten such a good young man as he is?"

"Let us hope, madam, that nothing threatens him," replied Nick. "I must go now at once. If the doctor should return here before I do, please ask him to telephone to my office and to remain here until I see him. Have you a telephone in your house?"

"Yes;" and she gave him the number.

The detective hastened away then and went at once to the corner of Fourth Avenue and 112th Street.

Everybody knows that the tracks of the Hudson River and the New Haven railroads pass along this avenue just there, and as Nick halted on the corner he noticed that a number of boys were playing ball in 112th Street near the corner.

He walked slowly toward them, and after a moment, when there was a lull in the game, he called them to him.

"Boys," he said, "I have got a dime for each of you if you can give me some information that I want."

"Yes, sir," they replied eagerly.

"Which of you was it who carried a note to Doctor Wheaton, in this street, rather more than an hour ago?"

"I know who it was," chirped up one of the lads. "It wasn't any of us at all, sir. It was Jimmy Dugan."

"And where is Jimmy Dugan?"

"He's gone home."

"Where does he live?"

"Over on Third Avenue."

"Will you go with me to help me find him?"

"Yes, sir; we'll all go."

"Come along, then; lead the way. I will follow."

And with this body-guard to assist him Nick was not long in finding Jimmy Dugan.

"Jimmy," said Nick, "did you carry a letter to Doctor Wheaton, in 112th Street, a little while ago?"

"Yes, sir, I did; an' the lady give me a half quarter for doin' it, too."

"It was a lady who sent the note, was it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you know she looked?"

"She had a veil over her face, sir. I couldn't see that. But she had a sweet voice, sir; and she give me a half quarter."

"What did she say to you when she asked you to deliver the note, Jimmy?"

"She said she'd give me a quarter if I'd take it to the house. I asked her if there was any answer, and she said she only wanted to know that it was delivered to the right party; so when a man comes to the door, I asked him if he was Doc Wheaton, and he said he was. Then I gives him the letter, and he says he would go at once. Then I runs back and tells the loidy. That's all."

"What did you do then?"

"I went back to the boys to finish the game, but Spike Madden had got into the game and there wasn't any place for me, so I got huffy and came home."

"Then you did not see the doctor when he met the lady on the corner?"

"No, sir. I didn't know that he met her there."

"Did any of you see them meet?" asked the detective of the others.

"Yes, sir," they replied, in unison.

"What happened when they met?"

"Nothin' at all. They jest walked away together."

"In which direction?"

"Up Fourth Avenue."

"Jimmy," said Nick, turning again to the impromptu messenger, "was the lady dressed in black?"

"Yes, sir."

"And was the veil also black?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, boys, I am greatly obliged to you. I see that there are just ten of you, so here is a dollar which you are to have changed and each of you is to have a dime out of it."

He turned away from their thanks, but he had not gone far when he heard running feet behind him, and presently Jimmy Dugan caught up with him.

"Please, sir," he said breathlessly, "there is something else."

"What else?" asked the detective, coming to a halt.

"When the loidy opened her purse to find the quarter to give me, this dropped out of it. She didn't see it and I didn't say nothing at the time, either. But I picked it up before I went away."

It was an ordinary card with a name engraved upon it that the boy now gave to the detective, and not without a start of surprise the detective read:

"Miss Norma Denton;" and below the name in one corner of the card: "Graduated Trained Nurse."

"Thank you," he said to the boy. "I guess that is worth another quarter, Jimmy; and now one thing more."

"Yes, sir."

"Can you keep a secret?"

"You bet I can, sir."

"And do you think you would recognize that lady if you should see her again?"

"I'm sure of it, sir. I'd know her walk if nothing else."

"Good. If you should happen to see her again, and can find out for me where she is living, I will give you five dollars to put in the bank."

"Gee!" exclaimed Jimmy—and was silent.

"And," continued the detective, "if you should succeed in finding out anything about her, you are to bring the information to me at once." He told the lad his address, and then added:

"I am Nick Carter, Jimmy."

The boy had been smiling into his face, but now the smile froze there. For an instant the lad seemed turned to stone in his astonishment. Then he partly recovered his powers of speech, and he said:

"Hully gee!" Then after an instant he added:

"Is that straight? There ain't no mistake about that, is there?"

"No, my lad. I am Nick Carter."

"And if I find that loidy, I'll be like Chick and the others, won't I? I'll be one of your assistants for awhile, won't I?"

"You certainly will."

Jimmy stood staring into vacancy for a moment, and then very slowly he said:

"I'll find her if it takes a leg—if it takes both legs!"

"Shake hands on that, Jimmy," said Nick, extending his own.

"Gee! May I?" and the lad extended his grimy little paw and rested it in the detective's palm.

"I—I—guess I can find her, sir," he said, "and when I do I'll go to your house with the news myself."

"That's right," said Nick. "I will expect you."

CHAPTER VIII.

BORIS GRANLEY'S WARNING.

Kearney & Carroll is the name of a firm in New York city which is widely known as engravers of cards and wedding invitations, menus, etc., and it occurred to the detective, after examining the card that Jimmy Dugan had given him, that the work looked as if it might have been performed by that firm. He therefore lost no time in applying to them.

He found the manager, told him who he was, and gave the card into his hands.

"I wish you would tell me if that is your work," he said.

"There is no doubt about it at all," was the reply. "It is our work."

"Would your books tell me when the work was done?"

"Yes."

"And the address of the person for whom it was done?"

"Yes."

The result of the interview was that when Nick Carter left the place he went at once to an address in the upper part of the city on the West Side and inquired there if he could see Miss Denton.

"She is out," was the astonishing reply; for it conveyed the idea that she still lived there.

"When did she go out?" asked the detective.

"About an hour ago, sir."

"Indeed! When is she likely to return?"

"That I couldn't say, sir. Maybe not for a week."

"Eh? How is that? Is she in the habit of remaining away so long at a time?"

"Yes, sir, often. She is a trained nurse; and just lately she has given up a place she had in one of the hospitals, and has taken to private nursing. She has gone on a case now."

"Ah! Can you tell me where? I am very anxious to find her."

"She didn't tell me. I haven't the least idea where she has gone. She left no word about it whatever."

"Has she lived here with you long?"

"About three months."

"You know her quite well, then?"

"No, sir; I can't say I do. She always kept very much to herself. I rarely saw her at all, more'n to say 'how-de-do' to her."

"Did you see her when she went out an hour ago?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was she alone?"

"Yes."

"How long had she been in the house at that time?"

"I just told you she had been here three months."

"I didn't mean that. I meant how long had she been

in the house this particular time? She must have come in shortly before she went out, didn't she?"

"I think she did; about half an hour or so before. But what do you want to know so much about her for?"

"I am very anxious to find her. Did she take anything with her when she went out?"

"A dress-suit case."

"Did she appear to be in trouble; or did she look perfectly natural to you, madam?"

"Well, sir, now that you speak of it, I thought that there was something strange about her."

"What was it that made her appear strange?"

"She wore a veil, for one thing. I never knew her to do that before. She only pulled it aside once, and then only for a minute."

"Did you speak with her at all?"

"Yes; she came to me to pay me some money. She paid me for three weeks in advance."

"What did she have to say to you?"

"Nothing much at all. She just said she didn't know when she'd be back, and she gave me the money. I asked her where she was going, and she didn't answer. That's all."

"Did she leave the house on foot?"

"No; there was a hack waiting for her at the door. She got into that. I say it was a hack, but I think rather that it was somebody's private carriage, for the horses were uncommonly nice. I suppose the rig must have belonged to the people she was going to nurse for."

"Probably. Madam, I am going to tell you a secret."

"Yes, sir," eagerely.

"Miss Denton has strangely disappeared. I have reason to suppose that the woman you saw in your house an hour or more ago, and who gave you the money, was not Miss Denton at all, but in fact was another person who was masquerading as Miss Denton."

"Good gracious, sir!"

"I wish you would take me to Miss Denton's room and let me examine it."

"Certainly, sir. Come right along. She always keeps it locked when she is out, but I have a key, for I don't like to have a room in my house that I cannot enter when I want to."

"I should say not."

The woman disappeared and presently returned with a key, after which she led the way to the third floor, where she opened the door of the rear room and stepped aside for the detective to enter.

The instant that Nick crossed the threshold he understood that whoever had been there—whether it was Madge or Miss Denton—she had no idea of ever returning.

The closet had been stripped of its contents, and the bureau drawers had been emptied and much of their former contents were littered about the room.

There was a heap of ashes in the grate where papers had been burned, and there were other evidences that this had been the last call that the woman had intended to make at that house.

The landlady was plainly dismayed.

"The huzzy!" she exclaimed; and she asked: "Now, what do you suppose she paid me for three weeks in advance for, if she did not intend to return here at all?"

"In order that you would be in no haste to disturb her room," replied Nick.

"Well, she needn't have been so cocksure of that. I'd have been in here before night, anyhow. That I would!"

"I do not doubt it. You are a very careful landlady."

"I do try to be, sir."

"What can you tell me about Miss Denton? I mean, what do you know about her since she first came to your house three months ago?"

"I can't say a word against her, sir. She was very quiet. She always attended to her own affairs. She never had any callers, and she rarely got any letters."

"I don't suppose that you ever happened to see any of those letters, did you?"

"No, sir. It was funny—I often thought about it—but she seemed to know just when her letter was coming and she always waited for it. All that I know about them, sir, is that they were always in the same handwriting. She always took them to her room to read."

"Was the address written by a man or by a woman?"

"I should say a woman, sir."

"Did you notice the postmark ever?"

"Brooklyn."

"Are you quite positive in your own mind that the young woman who left here an hour ago was Miss Denton?"

"No, sir, I ain't; not since what you said about it. I don't suppose I ever would have given it another thought, but now I begin to think that it wasn't Miss Denton at all."

"Whoever it was, she seems to have left nothing here that is of value."

"That's true enough, sir."

Nick had been poking around among the embers in the grate, but now he arose, having discovered nothing at all; and ten minutes later he was in the street again, very little wiser than when he entered the house.

"I seem to be following a very blind trail," he mused, as he made his way toward his own home. "In fact, there isn't any trail at all, and I think that I had better get back to the ghost end of it, and ascertain what that will lead me to."

But he stopped to see Doris Granley, while on his way home.

"Have you seen Hamilton since yesterday?" he asked her, as soon as he entered.

"Yes," she replied. "He left here half an hour ago."

"I suppose he told you of our interview, didn't he?"

"Yes; he told me."

"And are you convinced, Doris, that you have not seen a ghost?" he asked, smiling.

"Oh, yes. I never did really believe that it was a ghost. But I was frightened, just the same."

"You are convinced now that what you saw was Madge in person?"

"Yes."

"I have an idea that she will visit you again, Doris."

"Oh, I hope not."

"I think she will come again."

"Well, I have had a bolt put on the inside of my door. I don't think she can get in now. Larry said that she unlocked the door with some sort of an instrument that will turn a key from the outside; but there isn't any tool that could move a bolt from the outside of a door, is there?"

"None that I know of."

"What makes you suppose that she will come here again, Mr. Carter?" asked Doris anxiously.

"She kidnaped you once, Doris. I want you to be brave, for I think she means to try to do it again. I don't know why. I haven't the least idea what her game is at present, but that she has some deep plot on hand is evident. I have come here to tell you this in order that you will be thoroughly on your guard. I don't want you to run any risks. I think that it would be well if you would have your maid sleep in the front room with you, or at least, in the adjoining one."

"She does that now. I have had her on a cot in my room ever since I saw Madge the last time."

"That is well. Another thing; I don't want you to go out anywhere for the present alone. Will you promise me that?"

"Yes."

Both were silent for a moment, and then Doris asked quite suddenly:

"I don't want to be impertinent, but——"

"Go on, Doris. What is it that you would ask?"

"Didn't Madge Morley pretend to be in love with you?"

"Yes; I believe she did—pretend to be."

"I think she meant it."

"Nonsense!"

"Trust a woman's intuition for once."

"Well, what of it even if she were in earnest?"

"I think that is the secret of her actions now.

"Eh?"

"You say that you cannot guess what her plot is. Shall I tell you what I think it is?"

"I wish you would, Doris."

"She means to attack you through your friends, somehow. Through me; through Larry Hamilton; through anybody whom you love or loves you. She means to reach you in a manner you cannot avoid, and she means to put you where she can dictate her own terms."

CHAPTER IX.

NICK CARTER SEES THE GHOST.

Nick Carter returned to his home in a very thoughtful mood.

He did not go out again that day; but later he called Doctor Wheaton's landlady over the telephone to inquire if the doctor had returned, but only to be told that there was no news of him whatever.

Then he called Lawrence Hamilton, at his club, and was told that Mr. Hamilton was out. The information here was that Hamilton had been called out of town by a telegram.

Nick retired at ten o'clock that night, for he was very weary; not with the work he had done that day, but from the continued strain that had been upon him during the time he had been away from home.

Not one of his assistants was at home at the time, and there seemed nothing to do but to go to bed.

He smiled to himself as he was about to turn off the light, and he murmured:

"I wish that Madge would take it into her head to lay the ghost with me."

Nick Carter is always a very light sleeper, but on this particular night he was very tired, as has already been said, and therefore he must have slept much more soundly than usual; or if not that, then the person or persons who finally disturbed him must have been past masters in the art of moving noiselessly about a house.

At all events, sometime during the night, he was conscious that a sudden weight—a very light one, but nevertheless a weight—had fallen upon him.

Where it touched his face, it was cool, like metal; and he was conscious at the same instant that it enveloped him entirely—from his head to his feet.

Remember that it was the month of June and that he was sleeping with only a sheet and a thin blanket over him.

He started awake on the instant that he felt that touch but something held him down upon the bed so that he could not rise.

He could not raise his head, his feet or his hands, and while he sought to do so the thing that had fallen upon him was drawn down even more tightly, and he could hear a slight, grating noise at either side of his bed.

There was no sound other than that, and so he called out:

"Who is there? What has happened?"

There was no reply; only a continuance of that strange, steadily noise at either side of the bed.

And now he made a mighty struggle to escape from the meshes that held him—and meshes they were indeed, for he but known it—but he quickly discovered that even with his great strength the effort was useless.

He desisted then, and waited, thinking the while, with a grim smile:

"I suppose it is the ghost at last. But if it is, Madge has sure trussed me up in fine shape before venturing to make her appearance."

He had not the least idea what it was that was holding him down, only he knew that it was made of metal—steel, probably—and was as pliable as a coat of mail; that it was in fact a steel blanket he had yet to discover.

Presently the noises near him ceased altogether, and although he listened intently he could hear no sound.

Minutes passed, and he had begun to think that the phantom had left him for good and all, when suddenly there appeared at the foot of his bed the apparition of Madge exactly as Hamilton had described it.

It was Madge sure enough. He had no sort of doubt of that.

There was the gauzelike garment with the lights shining through it, the white face, and the generally unearthly appearance of the whole thing.

As Nick looked upon the apparition he could understand how it was that Hamilton, strong man that he was, had been startled almost out of his senses the first time he had seen it, and how Doris had been frightened into unconsciousness.

"Well, Madge," said the detective coolly, "you have decided to make me a call, have you?"

There was no reply.

"I hope you did not suppose that you would impress me with this ghost business, did you?"

Still there was no reply.

"What is this thing you have put over me that holds me down so well, Madge?" he asked.

She did not answer.

The detective waited a moment, and then he said:

"Don't you think that it is rather improper for a lady to appear in a gentleman's room as you have, at this time of the night? I hope you have brought a chaperon with you, Madge."

Silence was the only response, and Nick laughed aloud.

"Really," he said, "you are carrying out the farce rather well; but don't you think it would be a saving of time if you were to get about the plans that brought you here?"

Instantly the lights with which the strange figure was illuminated went out. Nick could hear the swish of feminine garments as some one crossed the floor. Then there was a snap, as somebody turned on the switch of the electric lights, and every light in the room flashed into being.

But Madge had disappeared.

As far as Nick could determine he was alone in the room—his own sleeping-room.

He glanced toward the door; it was closed. Then he tried to discover what it was that held him a prisoner upon the bed.

While he was studying these things, the door opened again, and Madge entered the room.

She had thrown aside her ghostly garment and had removed the white powder from her face; and she appeared before him in a well-fitting masculine suit of knickerbockers and with a cap set jauntily on the side of her head, while her hair, like spun and burnished cop-

per, had been allowed to fall in waving masses over her shoulders.

She was smiling upon the detective, too, showing her white and even teeth and the dimples in her cheeks and chin. She was puffing leisurely upon a cigarette, and there was a small, silver-mounted revolver and a poniard thrust into her belt.

"Upon my word, Madge!" exclaimed the detective, not without honest admiration, "you are a picture. I did not realize how beautiful you are until now."

"Thank you," she replied demurely. "Are you quite comfortable, Nick?"

"Quite so, thank you."

"I suppose you are anxious to know why I called?"

"Oh, I am in no hurry. Take your time, Madge."

"You knew that I was alive, didn't you?"

"Certainly."

"I did not expect to fool you for a very long time, Nick."

"No?"

"You see that I have entirely recovered from my wound, don't you?"

"So it would appear."

"You have had rather a busy day, haven't you, Nick?"

"Yes, rather."

"How do you like chasing ghosts?"

"It's rather edifying, take it all in all."

"I've arranged a pair of surprises for you when you get about in the morning, Nick."

"Have you, indeed? What are they?"

"If I should tell you, there would be no surprises, would there?"

"No, I suppose not."

She laughed pleasantly.

"Am I to understand that I am to 'get about' in the morning as usual?" asked Nick.

"Certainly. What did you expect?"

"Why, I had an idea that, since you had gotten me so nicely fastened down here, you might be contemplating another operation, with Nick Carter as the principal actor."

Madge laughed merrily at this.

"You are certainly original, Nick," she said. "No, I had no such idea as that. I think altogether too much of you for that."

"I suppose I ought to feel very grateful."

"Indeed, you ought."

"May I venture to inquire why you are here at all, then?"

"Haven't you discovered?"

"I can't say that I have."

"I wished to have a chat with you."

"Oh; I see."

"You might not have consented to sit quietly by and listen to me if I had not found a way to hold you down; don't you see?"

"Yes. That was very clever of you."

"Oh, I am clever. Don't let yourself forget that."

"I'm not likely to do so."

"There is no one, Nick, who can move about so quietly as I; there is no one who can enter a house in the dead of night, as I can, without waking even a dog. I am a master at that art, Nick Carter."

"I can quite believe you."

"I knew that all of your assistants were away from home. I thought it a good time to make my call upon you."

"If you were in the mood to kill me, Madge," said Nick, smiling coolly at her, "you could do it now very easily."

"Oh, I am perfectly well aware of that fact; but I haven't the least idea of killing you now, or at any other time; nor do I intend to injure you, even."

"Really? That is quite reassuring."

"Isn't it?"

"What are you intending to do with me? Surely you did not bind me down in this manner for nothing at all."

"I did it so that I could chat with you. I wished to see you; to talk with you; to hear you talk. Oh, I do not intend to hurt you. I shall preserve you for a much better fate than that."

"Humph!" said Nick.

"Nick," she asked, "have you ever been very fond of reading novels?"

"Sometimes; some novels. Why?"

"Haven't you read books where the villain of the story stole the heroine away and imprisoned her in order to force her to consent to become his wife?"

"Often."

"Well, this is a reversal of that idea—only I have no intention of imprisoning you."

"What the dev—" began Nick. Then he burst out laughing.

"Really, Madge," he said, "you are funny."

"Haven't I told you more than once that you are the only man I ever saw for whom I cared one jot or tittle?"

"Bosh, Madge!"

She shrugged her shoulders and lighted a fresh cigarette.

"You won't say that," she remarked calmly, "when you are entirely familiar with my——"

"With your methods of making love?" he asked ironically.

"Yes," she replied. "Just that."

CHAPTER X.

A WOMAN TO BE FEARED.

"Perhaps," said the detective, "since you have me so completely at a disadvantage, you will enlighten me a little regarding those methods."

"I had supposed," she replied, "that you had already received some enlightenment."

"It is beginning to dawn upon me," he laughed.

"Do you know what time it is?" she asked, rather irrelevantly, he thought; and he glanced toward the mantle.

"It is getting well along toward the time for daylight," he replied. "Why?"

"I want you to remember to-morrow what time it was that you saw me. You see, Nick, I have been rather busy to-night—that is, since midnight. I have been arranging those surprises for you."

"I do."

"I have made a little call upon Doris already; and I have also made another call. Both have been fruitful, believe me."

The detective frowned.

"Why can't you leave Doris alone, Madge?" he asked [illegible] She has never done anything to injure you."

"I don't know; she? You and I do not agree on that subject."

"What in the world has she ever done to you?"

"Well, once she stepped between me and a fortune; she stepped between me and an honorable career for the rest of my life—a career in which I might possibly have won your love, Nick Carter. Do you suppose that I can ever forgive her for that?"

"Oh, you're talking through your hat. You make me tired, Madge."

"I am talking to considerable purpose, I am. I believe that you are in love with her, Nick."

"That is nonsense, and you know it. Doris is going to marry Hamilton. They are engaged."

"That doesn't make any difference in your feelings in the matter."

"She is only a child to me," insisted Nick. "She is like a daughter to me. You remember that time long ago when I rescued her from the snow and brought her here. She——"

"Drop it, Nick. She doesn't count in the game I am playing, only for a pawn; but she is to be the pawn with which I will checkmate you, all the same."

"Why don't you do your checkmating right now? You've got the chance, and I don't believe you will ever have it again."

"You don't half know me yet," she replied; and she lighted a third cigarette.

"Madge," said the detective, as much to change the subject as anything else, for he had no idea that she would reply to his question, "did you kill Doctor Weeks?"

"No; he died of apoplexy, I am told."

"He did it at a very fortunate time for your purposes, didn't he?" asked Nick.

"Oh, I don't know about that. He would never have told what he knew about my escape from the hospital."

"Why not?"

"Doctor Weeks and I were old acquaintances," she retorted.

"As old acquaintances as you and Norma Denton, for instance?"

Madge shot a quick glance at the detective, and frowned.

"Very probably," she replied calmly.

"I suppose you will admit that you murdered Norma Denton, won't you?" he asked.

She did not reply, and he added:

"And then sent her body to be incinerated, in place of your own; eh?"

She looked toward him quickly.

"Is that the way you figure it out?" she asked, smiling.

"Yes. That is about it."

"Try another tack, Nick. You are away off in that one."

"There was a body cremated. The description answered to her."

Madge shrugged her shoulders, and laughed.

"I'm not going to help you out in your guesses," she said.

"Anyhow, it was you who went to her room yesterday, and carried away part of her things, after giving the landlady three weeks' pay in advance."

"Was it?" she replied. "I did not suppose you had discovered that address. I am glad you told me, for I had intended to go there again. I wonder how you found that address."

"From Dempsey and Carroll."

"Dempsey and Carroll? Who are they?"

"The people who engraved Miss Denton's cards."

"Oh. You must have found the boy who carried the note to the doctor—to Doctor Wheaton—didn't you? And he gave you the card which I dropped purposely. That was a smart kid, Nick. He thought I did not know that I had dropped a card. And now, I suppose, he is in your pay, trying to find out where I live; no?"

"You are very shrewd, Madge," was the detective's only reply.

"That is part of my trade—just as it is also part of yours."

"I hope you haven't done any harm to Doctor Wheaton."

"Oh, he is all right. Don't worry about him. How does it feel, Nick, for a great strong man like you to be so easily placed entirely at the mercy of a woman like me?" she asked.

"It's rather annoying, Madge. I don't see how you did it. You must have had somebody to help you."

"I did it," she said, ignoring his implied question, "in order to give you an object-lesson."

"An object-lesson in what?"

"In what I can accomplish. I wished you to understand that, shrewd as you are, strong as you are, wise as you are, you are still no match for me at this game. I wanted you to know that you cannot hedge yourself around, now or ever, so that I cannot get at you. I want you to realize that, once I have set my heart upon attaining a result, nothing stops me."

"Go on, Madge. That is quite a speech."

"This is an occasion where I am the cat and you are the mouse. I shall play with you to the end of the game, and in the end, if you do not consent to my terms, I shall kill, kill, kill! Kill! Do you understand that?"

"You say it quite plainly."

"I shall kill Larry Hamilton, because you like him. I shall kill Doris, because you like her all too well to suit me. There are others, whom I need not mention, whom I will also make an end of, just to impress upon you the fact that I do it all because of you. And last, but not least, if I cannot win you to my way of thinking, I shall get you into some such fix as you are at this moment, and then we will cross the dark river together, side by side; for, when I have lost—if I do lose—I shall kill you and myself at the same time."

"Madge, I wonder——" He stopped.

"Wonder what?" she asked.

"I wonder if you are not a little bit—er—mad? Eh?"

"Possibly," she replied, rather sadly.

"That head of yours isn't on exactly straight, Madge. It is a little bit out of plumb. It is inclined to be—er—what the world calls bug-house, isn't it? Eh? Loco. No?"

"I don't know. Maybe so," she laughed. "Anyhow, if I am a bit crazy, you will have to take the consequences of my insanity, Nick."

"Don't you think you are making rather an extended call, Miss Morley?" he asked ironically. "If you are not careful, it will be broad daylight before you take your departure."

"I guess you are right about that," she exclaimed; and she started to her feet. "I suppose you have been wondering why Joseph, or one of the members of your household who are at home, do not come to your assistance; eh?"

"I admit that I have given it some thought," he replied.

"I made my calls upon them before I ventured to interfere with you," she said. "They are all sleeping soundly—just as I shall leave you."

She crossed the room until she was close beside him, and then she took a phial and a handkerchief from her pockets.

"This is chloroform, Nick," she said.

"I guessed as much," he replied. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I am going to give you your choice of taking enough of it—willingly and without attempting to resist the effects of it—to put you into an easy slumber, or compelling me to use this."

She held up a hypodermic syringe so that he could see what it was.

"This is loaded with morphine," she said. "I can shoot it into your arm without any trouble at all. You cannot avoid it, can you?"

"Possibly not."

"You know that you cannot."

"Well?"

"Morphine leaves an unpleasant effect. It is much worse than chloroform."

"Well?"

"You have often chloroformed others, haven't you?"

"I have done such things—yes."

"If you will inhale enough of this, after I have pressed a cone, to make you sleep pleasantly, I need not give you a big dose. If you refuse, I shall merely jab this gun into you and administer the morphine. Which do you prefer?"

"Oh, give me the chloroform, since it must be one or the other, Madge."

"That is very sensible," she said; and she prepared the cone, dropped the handkerchief into it, and then poured the chloroform upon the handkerchief.

"Ready, now," she said; and she clapped it over his nostrils and mouth.

Holding it there, she said to him:

"I know that it is your idea that you can fool me; that you can take a little and pretend that you are sleeping when you are not; but I warn you not to try that on, for I shall watch closely, and I will not release you until I am certain that you are unconscious."

* * * * * * *

When Nick Carter opened his eyes again, the sun was shining into his room, and he was conscious of the fact that he had a headache.

He lay there blinking for a few moments, trying to remember what had happened; and then in a flash it all came back to him, and he leaped from the bed to the floor.

His first glance was toward the clock, and he saw that it was after six. It had not been quite four when Madge had spoken to him last.

He turned and looked toward the bed, expecting to find the cruel blanket that had held him a prisoner so effectually; but it was gone, and there was no trace left that any stranger had been inside his room.

"For cool, audacious daring," he said to himself, as he hurried to the bathroom and started the water flowing in the tub, "I have never happened to encounter anybody, man or woman, who was quite the equal of Madge Morley. One thing is mighty sure; she shall not catch me napping again."

He had just finished dressing when Joseph came to tell him that somebody wanted him on the telephone, and to ask if he should make the connection with the phone in the bedroom.

"It is Mrs. Aldershot," he explained.

Instantly Nick was alert.

"Yes," he said. "By all means let her speak with me;" and a moment later he heard:

"Is that you, Mr. Carter?"

"Yes. What is the matter, Mrs. Aldershot?" he replied.

"Doris is missing. She has been stolen bodily from the house, and the house itself has been looted from top to bottom of everything of value that could be carried away. Do come to us at once."

CHAPTER XI.

THE SECOND SURPRISE—JIMMY DUGAN'S WORK.

"This, then," said the detective to himself after he had completed the examination of the Aldershot home, "is one of the surprises that Madge told me she had prepared for me. I wonder what the other one will be."

"Mr. Carter," said Mrs. Aldershot, when Nick turned to her, having finished his investigation of the premises, "I suppose there is no doubt that we have again to thank that terrible woman, Madge Morley, for what has happened?"

"There can be no doubt of that, Mrs. Aldershot," replied Nick.

"We shall never be safe as long as that woman is at large," she continued.

"I am afraid, madam, that you are right about that."

"She will end by murdering Doris. She may even have done so now."

"No," he said. "I do not think that. But she is a dangerous woman. There are no two ways about that. But, all the same, I believe that Doris will be safe in her hands for a time at least, for I happen to be aware of her motive in stealing Doris away. However, I must not linger here now. There is much for me to do."

He was turning away when Simpson, the butler, appeared at the door, and in his usual emotionless voice announced that Mr. Carter was wanted at the telephone.

It was Joseph at the other end of the wire, and, after satisfying himself that he was talking with his chief, he said:

"There is a lad here, sir, who says his name is Jimmy Dugan, and——"

"That's all right," interrupted the detective. "Keep him there, Joseph, and tell him that I will see him in a very few minutes."

"Yes, sir. There is something else, sir."

"What is it?"

"A message from Mr. Hamilton's club, sir, to say that Mr. Hamilton retired to his room as usual last night, about eleven o'clock. He left word to be called at seven, but when the servant went to call him the door to his room was wide open, the room itself was in great disorder, and Mr. Hamilton had disappeared. The man told me that there was every evidence about the room that Mr. Hamilton had been removed against his will."

The detective left the house hurriedly.

"Surprise number two," was his thought as he hurried toward his own home.

Jimmy Dugan was awaiting the detective in the reception-room, and his bright eyes were aglow with eagerness.

"Gee, Mr. Carter," he said rapturously, "I'm having the time of my life. I never expected that I'd even know you by sight, and here I am, helping you."

"Tell me what you know, Jimmy," said the detective. "A lot of things have happened since I saw you, my lad, and if you have discovered anything that is worth while you will help me more than you can guess."

"I have spotted the loidy," replied the boy laconically.

"Tell me all about it," commanded the detective calmly.

"Well, sir, I remembered what you said, you know. Not about the five dollars. I don't mean that; but that maybe I could help you."

Nick nodded.

"I says to myself that where a feller goes once, he's likely to go again, and it is maybe the same with a woman, so I hangs around that corner where I first seen her; and then it got dark, but——"

"Come to the point, Jimmy."

"I stayed there all night, I did, for I says to myself that people of her class go about in the night more'n they do in the daytime. Well, it must have been after one or two o'clock in the night when I sees her. First there was an automobile come whizzin' around the corner that almost knocked me down, but I dodged it and it druv up to a house half-way along the block and stopped there, and I saw a woman come out of the house and get inside. It was HER. I knowed her by her walk; but, gee! that auto whizzed away before you could say Jack Robinson and left me a-standin' there.

"I couldn't folly it, of course, but I says to myself that mebby she'd come back again, so I waited some more."

"Can't you hurry along with the story, Jimmy?"

"I'll try. The auto wasn't gone so very long—mebby an hour—when back it comes with a second woman inside. She looked sort of sick. I thought at first that she was dead; but, anyhow, I seen the chaffer and the first woman carry the other one into the house; and then they comes out again and jumps into the auto again and whirls away another time, leavin' me standin' there.

"Then I got to thinkin' that mebby they'd try that same dodge on again, and that it was up to me to go with 'em if they did. I had noticed a sort of rack on the back end of the auto—something like them things they carry trunks on behind hacks, you know."

Nick nodded again.

"Well, sure enough the auto did come back again—but it was after a much longer time than it was away the first time—and this time I thought that the woman and the chaffer were alone until they got out and went into the house together. But when I sneaked up to the machine to get into the rack I spoke about, I peeked inside the back and there was a man lying on the bottom of it, all bound and gagged for fair.

"I got the rack fixed so that I could climb into it in a second when I wanted to, and then I sneaked around behind the machine and waited.

"It wasn't more'n three minutes by the clock before out they comes again, and this time they was bringing the woman between them—the same one they had taken to the house first; and there was another woman following them. The woman that followed got into the front seat with the chaffer and the woman that I'd been spottin' got into the back with the one they'd brought out and with the feller that was tied up and gagged.

"I says to myself, 'Jimmy, this is your trick. Come seven, come 'leven;' and I lets down the rack and coseys myself onto it.

"Well, we went to 110th Street, then across the city to Second Avenue, then across Willis Avenue bridge into the Bronx, then out past the animal park—you know—then a little way along a country road, then through a gate into some grounds where there's big trees, and there we pulled up in front of a tumble-down old house—a big square house that looked as if it hadn't been lived in for a long time, that stands right in the middle of some

grounds with trees growin' all around it so's you can't see it from the road at all.

"I slipped out uh the rack to the ground and hid my self and watched 'em while they carried the man and the woman inside and made the other woman follow them.

"It was daylight then, and I was afraid of bein' caught, so I takes that time to skip, for I knowed the way; and finally I gets to the Third Avenue elevated, which goes almost out there—and here I am, sir."

"Jimmy, you have done nobly. I will find a way to reward you, too."

"I don't want no reward, sir, only——"

"Well?"

"I'd like to work for you some more."

"I will think about that. Now, can you find that house again?"

"You bet I can!"

The detective turned in his tracks and called to Joseph. "Order my Peerless as quickly as you can, Joseph," he said. "But first tell me if you have heard from Chick, or from any of the boys?"

"Chick is upstairs now, sir. He came in a few minutes after you went out."

"All right."

Fifteen minutes later Nick sat under the steering wheel of the Peerless with Jimmy at his side and Chick in the tonneau.

"We will stop at the 112th Street house first, Jimmy, if you can show me which one it is," said the detective.

It was eight o'clock when they drew up in front of the house in question, and bidding the lad to follow him, and Chick to remain with the machine, Nick sprang out and ran up the steps to the door.

To pick the lock of the vestibule door was the work of a moment, for Nick did not ring the bell. The inside door yielded almost as quickly, but here there was a chain on the inside. However, a pair of nippers cut it in half as if it were made of paper. Then the detective said:

"Jimmy, there was a policeman standing on the corner as we turned into this street. Go after him and bring him here."

While the boy hurried away, Nick ran up the stairs, searching one room after another until at last on the top floor in the rear room he found a man sleeping: the only occupant of the house, and undoubtedly the chauffeur who had driven the automobile for Madge.

Nick did not waste any time. He pounced upon the man instantly, and the fellow started from his sleep to find himself looking into the muzzle of a very business like appearing revolver.

"Get into your clothes," ordered Nick sternly. "Make haste, too, for I am in a hurry. As you are dressing, you will reply to a few questions and answer truthfully, too, if you know what is best for you. I am Nick Carter, and I mean business."

The man paled visibly, but he made no reply as he proceeded to don his clothing.

"You drove an automobile for Miss Morley—Madge Morley—last night, my man. You went from here to the Aldershot house on Fifth avenue, and you waited while Madge went inside and got Miss Doris Granley. Then you brought her here. Then you went back again to a certain club, and somehow Madge and you got Lawrence Hamilton out of that club. You tied him and gagged him and chucked him in the bottom of the tonneau, and then you went around to my own house where you waited, keeping watch over your prisoner while Madge played her little trick with me which she doubtless told you about.

"Shut up! Don't speak until I tell you to answer—until I ask a question. When she came out of my house, you returned here and then you brought Miss Granley and another woman out of this house and you drove the machine out past the zoological park to a house where you left the entire party. You see I know all about it; and now, answer me."

"I'm ready. I'm not going to put up any bluff against you, Carter. I don't like this business, anyhow. I told Madge that you'd get the best of her in the end. What do you want to know?"

"What became of Doctor Wheaton?"

"He is out there at that house, too."

"Has he been injured?"

"No."

"Who was the other woman—the third woman—who went with you to that house last night?"

"I don't know any more about that than you do, Carter."

"Don't lie to me."

"I'm not lying. I'm telling you the truth."

"How many people are in that house now?"

The man meditated.

"There should be six," he said; "but only two that you

will have to reckon with. There is Madge, and there is a big buck nigger who works for her. He is dangerous, too. Then there are Miss Granley and the other woman, the chap we got from the club, whose name is Hamilton, and Wheaton. That's all."

The policeman entered the room at that moment, and Nick said to him:

"Take this man to the station-house, and tell your captain that Nick Carter sent him. I want him held till I go after him."

And then, as the detective was turning away, the prisoner called out to him:

"I'll give you one pointer, Carter. You'd better hurry. Madge has got a launch waiting for her at City Island, and——"

But Nick Carter was already halfway to the street.

CHAPTER XII.

NICK CARTER'S DESPERATE FIGHT.

The detective left the automobile beside the road near the entrance to the grounds that Jimmy Dugan indicated to him as the place where the house was located where Madge had taken her prisoners, and followed by Chick and Jimmy he hastened along the weed-grown path toward the building which he could dimly see through the foliage of the surrounding trees.

It was almost ten o'clock in the morning when they got out of the car, and Nick believed that owing to the strenuousness of the preceding night, Madge would not have had time to get away from the place to that launch to which the chauffeur had referred.

As they approached the house it looked gloomy and silent; exactly as if it were entirely deserted; but Nick was not deceived by that.

"Now, Jimmy," he said, in a low tone, to the lad who had already done such good work for him, "I am going to give you a man's job for a little while, and I think you can do it."

"You betcher life I can!" was the reply.

"Take this revolver," continued the detective, "and wait right here among these bushes."

"I'm on," said Jimmy.

"If a big nigger, or that woman you followed last night, should run out of the house and attempt to get away, hold both of them or either one of them up at the point of your pistol, and if they don't stop——"

"I know."

"No; shoot low if you have to shoot. That is all for you, Jimmy. If I want you, I will call you."

"Right, sir."

"Now, Chick, you have got to cover the rear and both sides of the house. I am going inside."

"I guess I can do it," said Chick.

"Get around to the rear, then. I'll wait here until you are fixed. Just one thing before you go—*Madge must not get away this time.*"

"She won't—from me."

The detective waited where he was until he was assured that Chick had taken up his position, and then with a last admonition to Jimmy, he crossed the glade in front of the house and ascended the steps to the broad veranda.

As he had anticipated, the great front door was securely fastened, and he presently discovered that there were bolts inside which prevented him from making any use of his picklock.

He attempted then, to force it by pressing his knee against it; but he speedily found that the door resisted all such efforts, and after a moment of hesitation, he returned to the lawn in front of the house and picking up a stone that must have weighed fifty pounds that he had seen in passing, he carried it back again.

He took a position squarely in front of the door, and then raising the stone high above his head, he hurled it with all his strength against the door.

There followed a shattering and splintering of wood and a crash that should have been heard a mile away in that still morning air; and the door, broken from its fastenings, collapsed into the wide hallway of the old mansion.

"If they are all asleep, I reckon that woke them up," the detective thought, grimly, as he stepped across the threshold; and having done that he instantly jumped into a vacant room, where the door was standing open, and waited.

Nor did he have long to wait.

Not a minute of time had elapsed before he heard a stealthy tread along the upper hall, which presently began to descend the winding stairs, and peering through the crack between the door and the casing, he could plainly see the form of a huge negro, who was advancing toward him with a big club held tightly in one hand.

The detective waited where he was until the gigantic negro was exactly opposite the door where he was concealed.

He even permitted the negro to take two steps beyond it, and then he ran out, leaped into the air and lighted fairly upon the negro's shoulders, winding his legs around the giant's body and his arms around his neck, and twining his fingers into the fellow's throat in a way that would have choked any other man at once.

But the negro only grunted; and he managed to swing his club around so that it struck the detective on the head.

It was a light blow to be sure, but it almost did for Nick, nevertheless; and instantly the detective loosed his right arm and with his fist dealt the negro a terrible blow under the ear.

That blow would have knocked an ordinary man senseless; it did knock the negro to his knees, with Nick still atop of him; and then the giant reached up with his two brawny arms and seized Nick by the hair of his head.

But even as he did so, Nick managed to deliver a second blow in exactly the same spot where the first one had fallen, and with a groan the negro relaxed his hold and collapsed upon the floor.

A third blow followed the second one instantly; and then as the negro sank down insensible at the detective's feet, and just as he was in the act of rising, the report of a pistol sounded behind him and he felt a heavy blow against his side that was followed by a sharp spasm of pain.

But he struggled to his feet and turned.

He saw Madge, half-clad, rushing toward him, pistol in hand, and although his senses were reeling he attempted to intercept her.

She stopped in her tracks and laughed at him; and then she fired point blank at him again; and as he fell with a groan at her feet, she hurled the pistol at his head.

But at the same instant a small figure leaped through the doorway, darted forward, and, with a wild spring and a yell like a young Commanche Indian, Jimmy Dugan hurled himself fairly upon the woman and bore her, struggling, to the floor.

She tore at the lad with her teeth and nails; she shrieked and fought with all the mad strength of an insane woman; but Jimmy held on tightly, clutching his fingers around her slender throat and choking her with all the strength that ball-playing had put into his youthful muscles.

And then Chick appeared.

In a moment he had locked handcuffs upon the wrists and ankles of the woman, and then with Jimmy's assistance the negro was bound and fixed so that he could not escape; and then they turned to Nick Carter.

His eyes were open and he had crawled to the side wall and was bracing himself against it.

"I've got two of Madge's bullets in me," he said faintly, "but I don't think that either of them are very bad. Stop the bleeding if you can. It isn't her fault that she didn't kill me."

"No, indeed, it is not," she replied, from where she was lying on the floor; and she laughed harshly.

Strangely enough, both bullets had entered the detective's body within an inch of each other; and they had gone out again in almost the same spot; but a rib had been fractured in two places, and Nick Carter knew that for once in his life he was destined to be laid up for repairs for a considerable time to come.

"Take Jimmy and search the house, Chick," he commanded. "I will be all right here. Madge has collected quite a colony, but I guess she has made her last play for fame."

* * * * * * *

A few moments later Hamilton came down the stairs and stood smilingly before the wounded detective.

"By Jove, Nick!" he said, "they almost did you up that time, didn't they?"

"Not quite, however," replied the detective. "Tell me everything you know, Larry."

"Heavens! I couldn't do that in a year, Nick. But I'll tell you what you want to hear."

"Thank you; first, about Doris, please."

"Doris is all right. She's none the worse for her experience. She is dressing. She will be down in a minute. As for me, I went to bed in my room at the club and woke up—here. I don't know exactly where it is, but that doesn't matter. I don't know how Madge got me, but she did get me. She told me that she was going to kill me later on, and I suspect that she told Doris the same thing."

"And Doctor Wheaton?"

"Oh, yes. He is upstairs, too. I just left him there. Say, you remember about that nurse—her name was Norma Denton?—well, she is here, too. Something is the matter with her. She has been drugged, or something, but the doctor is attending her and he says that she'll come around all right. He is coming down right away to attend to you."

"Wait a moment, Larry," said Nick. Then he raised his voice.

"Madge?" he said.

"What do you want?" she retorted.

"Whose body was it that was cremated over at Fresh Pond?"

"Are you convinced that it wasn't Norma Denton's?" she asked.

"Yes. Who was it?"

"My mother."

"You didn't kill her, did you, Madge?"

"No. She had heart trouble all her life. I found her dead in her bed the morning after my escape from the hospital. I haven't killed anybody—unless you die of your wounds—and I hope you won't."

This is the end of the story.

Madge Morley was tried and sentenced for burglary—that being the most serious charge that could be brought against her.

Doctor Wheaton returned to his duties at the hospital, and two days later, when the authorities were on the point of proceeding against Norma Denton for her participation in the escape of Madge from the hospital, she disappeared. Before her departure she left a strange message for Wheaton, part of which was:

"I know that you have loved me. That is why I go. I am not worthy. My past is clouded. I was a diplomatic spy, once, in company with Madge Morley. My past is commingled with hers. I do not know—and I care less—what will become of me, but I do not think I will ever see you again. If I should change my mind, you will hear from me. Good-by."

Of course Nick Carter rapidly recovered from his wounds; but that is another story.

THE END.

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